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ABSTRACT

The report examines the attitudes of the 44 students in the Appalachia Educational Laboratory's Employer-Based Career Education (AEL/EBCE) program toward the program as indicated by their responses to an interview schedule (included in an appendix) administered near the end of the first program year (1972-73). Regarding post-high school plans most students intended to attend college or another postsecondary educational institution, but of this group only one-fourth had specific institutions and dates of entry in mind. All students testified that the program influenced their career decision. Regarding attitudes toward AEL/EBCE, nearly all students felt that the program met or exceeded their expectations. Students favorably compared the EBCE program with the public high schools they previously attended. Regarding suggestions for improving the EBCE program, most frequent student responses concerned specific aspects of the proram such as providing better job experiences. Comparing student outcomes to program objectives revealed that students' career decision-making ability and their planning skills were insufficiently developed, whereas their occupational knowledge and communications skills developed satisfactorily. (Author/JR)

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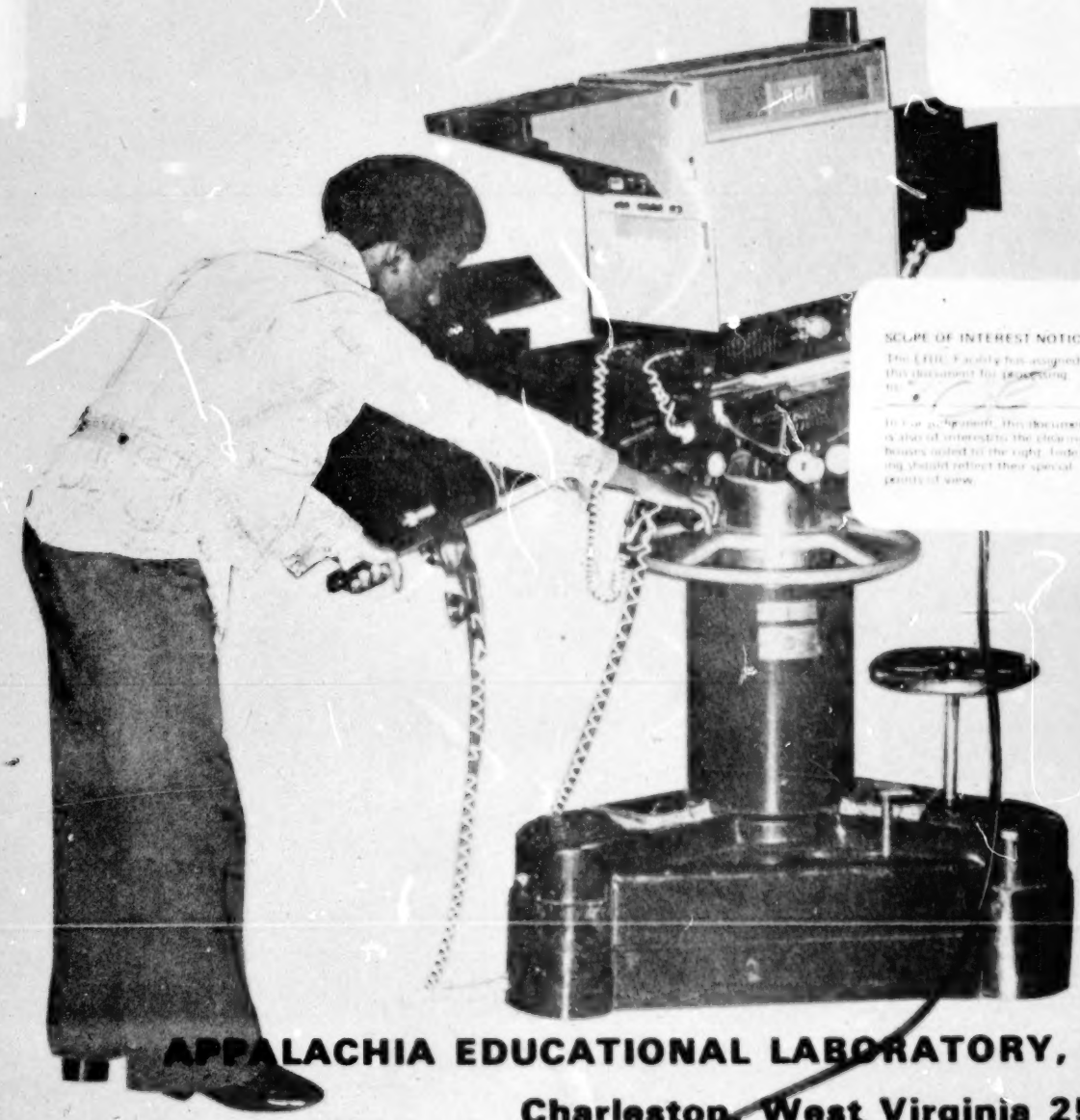
Employer-Based Career Education

Students' Attitudes Toward the Program as Indicated by an Analysis of Interview Data



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September 1973

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Cover picture: Sam Burge, an EBCE student learns the fundamentals of operating a television camera at WMUL-TV in Nitro, West Virginia

Employer-Based Career Education

Students' Attitudes Toward the Program as Indicated by an Analysis of Interview Data

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TECHNICAL REPORT NO. 42

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Preface

The Employer-Based Career Education program (EBCE) conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, Inc., is an alternative to conventional high school training. The following report is one of a series resulting from the evaluation of the program during the year beginning September, 1972, and ending June, 1973. The focus of this report is the attitudes of the participating students toward their experience in the program.

The report was written by Dr. John T. Seyfarth of the West Virginia College of Graduate Studies under contract to the Laboratory. Mrs. Beth Miller transcribed the interview tapes and coded the student responses as directed by Dr. Seyfarth. The EBCE evaluation was conducted and supervised by Dr. James H. Sanders, Evaluation Specialist with the Laboratory, and under the general direction of Dr. Charles L. Bertram, Director of Research and Evaluation for the Laboratory. The earlier drafts of this report were critically reviewed by Ms. Carol Sue Chandler, Learning Coordinator, and Mr. C. Steven Hyre, Associate Educational Development Specialist, of the EBCE operations and design staff.

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Introduction

Program Description

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) is designing, developing, and testing an educational alternative called Employer-Based Career Education (EBCE). The purpose of the program is to provide an alternative educational experience for a cross-section of high school age youths. This experience is characterized by an emphasis on direct employer-site experiences personalized to each student in terms of individual needs, interests, and abilities.

The EBCE program generally has been designed to be responsive to a student population with the following characteristics: (1) 16-20 years of age; (2) diverse socio-economic background; (3) diverse racial/cultural background; (4) a wide range of academic ability and achievement; and (5) diverse career aspirations. The AEL/EBCE program was tested with high school seniors from the Kanawha County (West Virginia) School System during September 1972 through June 1973.

Procedures

All 44 students were interviewed by a member of the staff of the Evaluation and Research Department of Appalachia Educational Laboratory near the end of the school year. The interview schedule (see Appendix) asked for information about students' future plans and their impressions of their experiences in the program. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed, coded, and the data analyzed by independent evaluators not associated with either the Laboratory or the EBCE Program.

Format

The report is divded into three sections: Introduction, Findings, and Summary. The summary section relates findings to the student-related goals of the program as identified in the Outline of Product Evaluation Plan for Employer-Based Career Education, published by the Laboratory in December 1972.

Findings

Post High School Plans

Table 1 presents findings regarding students' post high school plans. College attendance was in the plans of 19 of the 44 students (43.1 percent), compared to 11 persons planning to go to work on a specific job (25.0 percent) and seven with non-specific job plans (15.9 percent). Examples of specific employment plans were: Army; Marine Corps; working for the Department of Natural Resources; work as a secretary. Non-specific employment plans included such responses as: get a permanent job; move to Florida and go to work. The permanence of the position was not a factor in classifying the student's plans as specific. Those who knew for whom they would be employed, even though temporarily, were classified as specific responders.

Only six students (13.6 percent) have plans to seek training in post-secondary educational institutions other than colleges. Their fields of interest included secretarial and art training, x-ray technician, and heavy equipment operator. One student was undecided whether to enter the Air Force or go to college.

The specificity of a person's plans bears a relationship to the probability that he or she will actually follow through with them. For most people, college enrollment is the culminating event of a long period of investigation

and planning. It follows that students whose plans are less well developed will be less likely to carry them out.

Table 1

Post High School Plans of EBCE Seniors Reported in End-of-Year Interview

	N	%
College	19	43.1
Other post-secondary training	6	13.6
Specific employment plans	11	25.0
Non-specific employment plans	7	15.9
Undecided*	1	2.3
TOTALS	44	99.9

*College or Air Force

Table 2 presents evidence related to the specificity of EBCE students' post high school educational plans. The most specific plans were those in which both institution and date of entry were identified, and the least specific ones were those in which neither was named. It is assumed that the more specific a student's plans, the greater the probability they will be implemented. Seven out of 26 respondents--fewer than one-fourth--identified the school they expected to attend. (Six were colleges, one a school to train technicians.) By this reasoning, better than three-fourths of the EBCE students fall into a group for whom pre-enrollment attrition will very probably be high.

Table 2

Specificity of Plans of Students Attending
Post Secondary School or College

	N	%
Specified institution and date of entry	4	15.4
Specified institution but not entry date	3	11.5
Specified date but not institution	9	34.6
Specified neither	10*	38.5
TOTALS	26	100.0

*Includes Undecided category from Table 1

Accounting in part for the lack of specificity of educational plans was the fact that some students were required to earn money to offset the cost of additional training. Ten students said that they intended to work and save their money before going on for further schooling. That figure does not include those who declared an intention to work during the summer months prior to entering school in the fall. Since those students are probably one year or more away from entering a post secondary institution, they will still have time in which to investigate schools and finalize their plans.

For some students, college attendance appears to serve to postpone a decision about a career. Of eight persons (four of each sex) who had not settled on a career choice, five were planning to attend college. The girls were slightly more likely to plan to go to college--three of the four girls did so, compared to two of the boys.

As shown in Table 3, 18 persons said that the EBCE program had helped them to confirm a tentative career choice made prior to entering the program, and nine others had changed their mind about an earlier career choice and selected a new one. In every case students credited the program with influencing their decision.

Table 3

Stability and Change in Students' Career Choices during Year in EBCE Program: Decision Types and Frequencies

Decision Type	N	%
Tentative career choice confirmed	18	40.9
Tentative choice eliminated, new occupation picked	9	20.4
No selection made but field narrowed	8	18.2
No selection made and field widened	7	15.9
No response	2	4.5
TOTAL	44	99.9

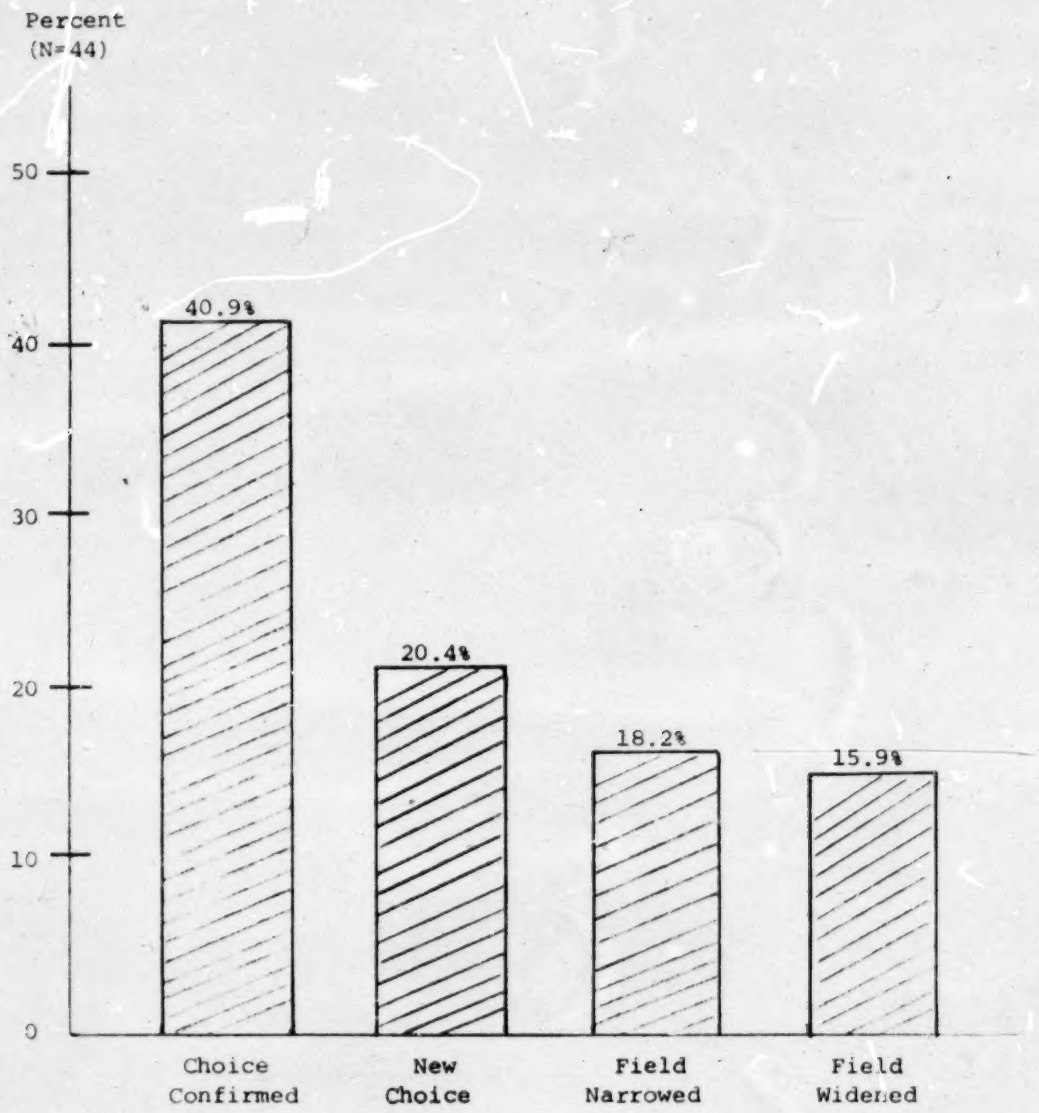
Among 17 persons who had not made a final determination of occupation, all except two reported that the program had influenced them somewhat; eight had narrowed their field of interest, while seven others had broadened the area of inquiry. These data are illustrated in Figure 1.

Students' Attitudes toward EBCE

Students were asked to recall what they had expected from the program at the time they entered. Although data of this type are subject to distortion because of selective recall, there are some interesting indications

Figure 1

Career Decision Status of EBCE Seniors
at End of Program Year



in the students' answers about the types of expectancies the program appears best to meet.

Students' responses to the question on expectations were placed in one of two categories. Instrumental responses were those in which the student reported having chosen the program in order to move toward accomplishment of a personal goal. All of these responses dealt with career exploration. Status responses, on the other hand, were more varied and were characterized by students' desires to experience more freedom, a slower academic pace, or to escape from an established and sometimes boring routine. Responses of this type frequently involved comparative descriptions of the ways in which the EBCE program was expected by the student to be similar to or different from other educational institutions with which he or she was familiar.

Forty-two students answered the question concerning expectations from the EBCE program, and there were a total of 47 responses. Response frequencies appear in Table 4. As shown in Figure 2, a combined total of more than 90 percent of the respondents felt that the program met or exceeded their expectations. Only four individuals felt the program failed to come up to their expectations.

Table 5 presents findings about the relationship between the type of expectation held by a student and its subsequent fulfillment. The fulfillment variable was dichotomized, with "expectations exceeded" responses constituting the high level.

Students who expected to learn about job opportunities or to break out of a routine had about equal rates of fulfillment. Those who entered the program seeking more independence and self-direction were, in two-thirds of the cases, not as sure they had found what they were looking for.

Table 4

Initial Expectations Held by Students at Time of Entering EBCE Program, As Recalled in Terminal Interview

Expectation	Number*	Percent of Responses
To learn about or try out jobs	26	55.3
To break out of fixed routine	7	14.9
To enhance independence and self-direction	6	12.8
Other	8	17.0
TOTALS	47	100.0

*Forty-two students answered; five gave two answers.

Table 5

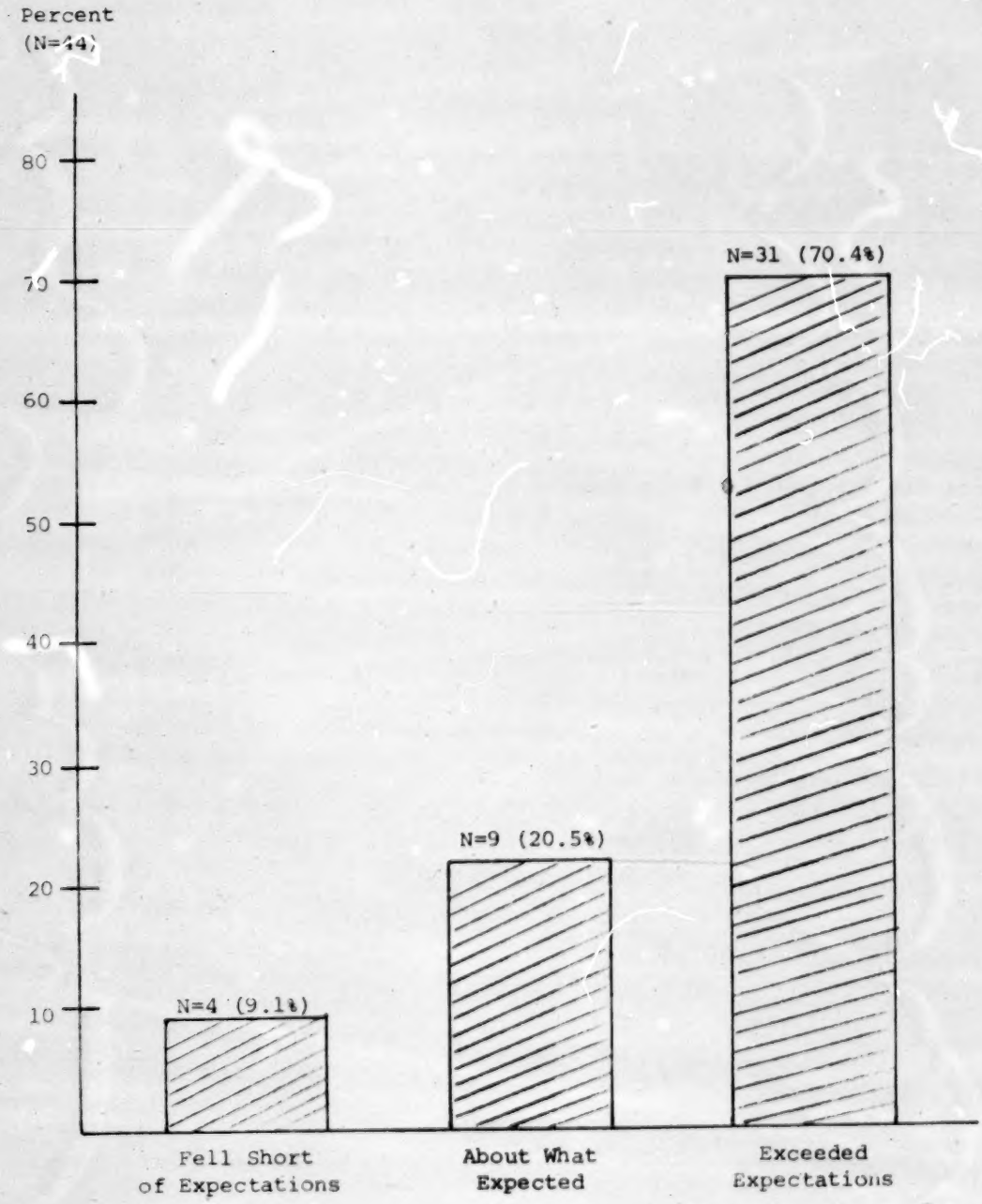
High Fulfillment of Students' Expectations for EBCE Program by Type of Expectation

Expectation	No. Holding Expectation	No. Reporting High Fulfillment	Percent High Fulfillment
To learn about or try out jobs	26	18	69.2
To break out of routine	7	5	71.4
To enhance independence and self-direction	6	2	33.3
Other	8	8	100.0
TOTALS	47*	33	61.0

*Total exceeds 44 because of multiple responses.

Figure 2

Frequency of Response by Level of Fulfillment of Students' Initial Expectations for Program



The interviews produced no information about the origin of students' expectations. Presumably students' expectations are influenced by program personnel and literature. Also, it appears possible that practices in effect early in the program's life may have generated expectations which were frustrated by subsequent shifts in policies. At any rate, it would be wise to help students verbalize their expectations for the program before they enter and to caution those whose expectations for the program appear to be unrealistic. Care should be taken that program personnel do not encourage unrealistic expectations. The question of what a student has a right to expect from the program is at another level of discourse and involves philosophical as well as practical considerations.

Students were asked which job experiences they liked best and least and their reasons. No employer received more than three mentions in either category, and some employers appeared on both lists. There were ten employers named by two or more students as best and an identical number received two or more mentions as worst experiences. Among the ten "best" employers were four educational and governmental agencies, one hospital, a public television station, and four commercial/industrial sites. Five non-profit educational or governmental agencies appeared on the list of worst job experiences, including one which also was chosen by two students as best. Other worst mentions included a hospital and four commercial/industrial establishments.

The reasons given by students for liking and disliking particular job assignments appear in Table 6. Forty-eight positive and 42 negative items were named. These were grouped under four factors--involvement, learning, acceptance, and working conditions. Items related to the factor of involvement were mentioned more often as a negative than a positive factor (47.6 percent

Table 6

Frequency and Percent of Mention of Positive and Negative Features of Most- and Least-Liked Job Experiences by Factor

Factor, Item, and Category	Number of Mentions	Percent of Category Total
Involvement		
Actually performed the job (positive)	16	33.3
Observed only or assigned trivial tasks (negative)	20	47.6
Learning		
Learned new things, gained useful experience (positive)	14	29.2
Activities outside of area of interest (negative)	12	28.6
Acceptance		
Friendly people (positive)	10	20.8
Felt part of work group (positive)	4	8.3
Felt used, taken advantage of (negative)	3	7.1
Working Conditions		
Kept busy (positive)	3	6.3
Nice surroundings (positive)	1	2.1
Work pressures (amount of work, lack of help) (negative)	6	14.3
Depressing atmosphere (ill or helpless people) (negative)	1	2.4

to 33.3 percent). Items classified as falling under the learning factor received about equal frequency of mention in the two categories (29.2 percent positive to 28.6 percent negative).

Items related to acceptance on the job were much more likely to be positive (29.1 percent total) than negative (7.1 percent). Working conditions brought forth more negative (16.7 percent total) mentions than positive ones (8.4 percent total).

Students who cited items related to the learning factor as positive or negative features of a job experience were measuring the experience against their own goals, values, and interests. Involvement-type items, on the other hand, were based on criteria acquired from and inherent to the job itself. For example, a student who complained of having been assigned "trivial" tasks on a job was reflecting the values of the work group with which he was associated. Such internalization of work group values is important and necessary for an employee, but students should recognize that there are important differences between their status and that of an employee.

EBCE students are marginal members of several groups. In transferring from their home high schools, even though they do not completely sever all ties, these youngsters leave a familiar and well-defined role and take on a new, poorly defined interstitial role. It is to be expected that students in this situation, especially those lacking strong egos, will seek to identify with role models.

For that reason it is important that students be helped to maintain detachment in evaluating and learning from their job experiences. Although cordial social relationships are gratifying, they may hinder rather than help the student to accomplish the purposes for which he entered the program

originally. A student who adapts the values espoused by a group with which he identifies without carefully examining them in the light of his own long-range goals may make a mistake which will take much time and effort to correct.

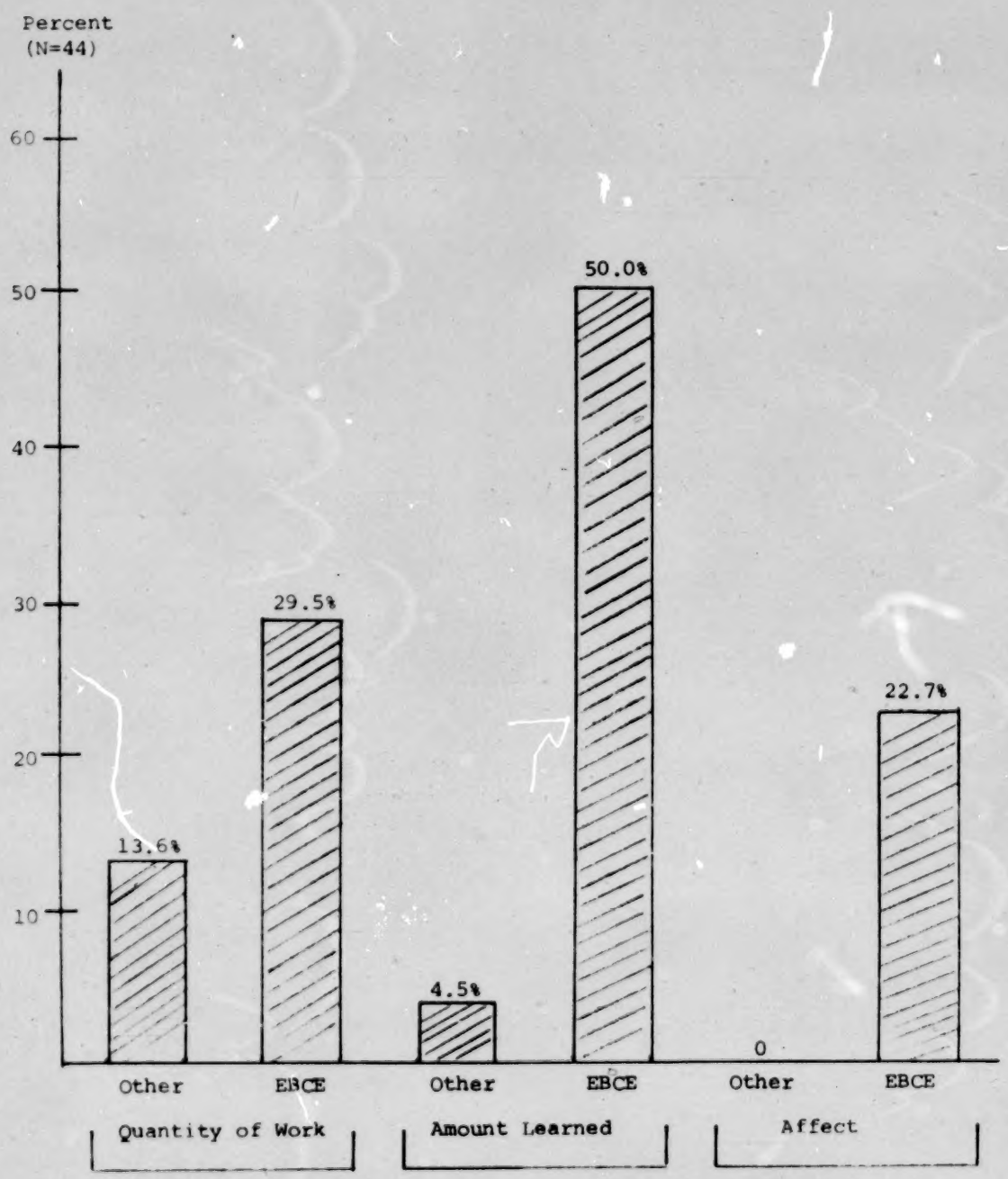
Students should be encouraged to employ a rational rather than an emotive approach to evaluating their experiences. They should be requested to identify their personal objectives in accepting a particular assignment and afterwards evaluating the extent to which they accomplished those objectives. They should be made aware of differences in levels of commitment on the job by having their attention drawn to other similar learning roles (apprentice, intern, graduate assistant, etc.). Simulation can be employed to help students evaluate their interests and skills apart from the social obligations of a work situation, and students should be encouraged to compare and contrast their experiences as a way of beginning to learn about themselves.

To a student, the most immediate standard against which to judge his experiences in the EBCE program is the high school he attended prior to entering EBCE. Many of the students in the program made such comparisons in three areas--the amount of work required in the two programs, the amount of learning occurring, and the personal satisfaction experienced. These data are illustrated in Figure 3. Thirteen individuals--nearly 30 percent--reported that EBCE required more work, compared with six persons--about fourteen percent--who did more work in their previous school. Half of the students--22 persons--learned more in EBCE. Ten of the students said they liked EBCE better than their previous school, and not one preferred the high school.

Parents of some students expressed concern about whether their children were learning as much as they would have in a conventional high school.

Figure 3

Students' Comparisons of EBCE Program and Previously Attended High School on Three Factors



(See Technical Report No. 43). The data reported in Figure 3 show that from the point of view of students' perceptions, the EBCE program does well in comparison with the public high school previously attended. However, the validity of these findings is subject to question for two reasons. The terms used are not precisely defined. For example, was the student who reported learning more in the EBCE program talking about job skills or academic information? Similarly, when a student reported that he did more work in EBCE, what exactly did he mean? The second reason has to do with the tendency of respondents to give what they believe are the expected answers.

The answers were in response to a question about "school requirements". The object was to find out whether the students, all of whom were seniors, had been able to complete the necessary requirements to receive their diploma. (All except one had done so, and he has since completed the requirements.) Some students interpreted the question differently or amplified their answer with voluntary comments about the program. The fact that the comments were volunteered and were in response to a question which did not call directly for evaluation provides a measure of confidence that the answers were not directly evoked. The precision of the answers might have been facilitated had the initial response been followed by a probe.

More precise answers comparing the EBCE and other school programs were forthcoming from questions directed more explicitly to such comparisons. One such question asked students to name the advantages of their previous school. Forty-two persons responded, and two-thirds of them reported no advantages. Extracurricular activities, more class time, and wider course selections were other answers. These findings are summarized in Table 7.

A similar question asked students to identify what they had gained from the EBCE program. These findings appear in Table 8. Occupational information

Table 7

Advantages of Previously Attended High School over EBCE Program Reported by Students

Item	N	%
No advantages	30	68.1
Extracurricular activities	5	11.4
More class time	4	9.1
Wider course selection	3	6.8
No response	2	4.6
TOTALS	44	100.0

Table 8

Information and Skills Acquired by EBCE Students as Reported by the Students

Item	Number	Percent of Responses
Occupational information	16	29.1
Job-related skills	11	20.0
Social skills	9	16.4
Character development	8	14.5
Information about issues	4	7.3
Other	7	12.7
TOTALS	55	100.0

and job-related skills (learning what is important in getting and holding a job) together accounted for about one-half of the responses. Other items mentioned included social skills, character development, and information about public issues.

Students' Suggested Improvements

Students were asked what suggestions they would make to improve the EBCE program. They responded with a variety of answers, as shown in Table 9. The most frequently mentioned items had to do with aspects of the program. (Examples: Provide better job experiences (five mentions); match student needs with job requirements; relate classwork to job requirements (two mentions); increase the length of stay at some job sites.)

Table 9

Students' Suggestions for Improving EBCE Program
by Category of Response

Category	Mentions	Percent of Responses
Program	21	32.3
Student autonomy	8	12.3
Informing students	8	12.3
Administrative	8	12.3
Rules and Regulations	7	10.8
Communication	6	9.2
Admission and Retention	5	7.7
Facilities	2	3.1
TOTALS	65	100.0

Other responses dealt with Student Autonomy and Informing Students. Examples of responses in the first category were: delegating more power to a student government organization and permitting students more say-so about their learning activities. Responses classified under the rubric of Informing Students had to do with keeping students aware of day-to-day matters at the EBCE program as well as at their home schools. Some students whose answers were classified in that category were referring to a desire for more clarity of role expectations.

Administrative suggestions had to do with routine matters such as providing parking permits and scheduling conferences at more convenient times.

Two students thought that rules of the program were too strict and should be relaxed; the other five persons believed that the rules were too lenient and urged that they be made more stringent. These responses appear in the category Rules and Regulations.

References to Communication problems had to do with difficulties students had experienced in scheduling conferences with staff members. Other comments in this category reflected a concern that certain staff members practiced duplicity or that students' suggestions and complaints were not being heard.

Four of the five students who expressed opinions classified under the Admission and Retention were concerned about maintaining standards of quality in the program. Three of the four suggested admitting students conditionally and terminating them if they failed to perform satisfactorily. The fourth suggested raising admissions standards. One student was in favor of open admissions.

Comments about Facilities had to do with cleanliness and the need for more space.

Summary

In this summary, data from student interviews will be examined for evidence of attainment (or lack of attainment) of student-related objectives of the EBCE program as described in a Laboratory publication entitled Outline of Product Evaluation Plan for Employer-Based Career Education published in December 1972.

Objective 1: Students Should Make Realistic Career Choices.

Judging by students' reports, the EBCE program had pervasive impact on individuals' career choices. However, more than one-third of the students in the program had not made a final decision about a career at the time of these interviews (Table 3). One or two individuals reported that they would continue to explore possibilities after leaving school, and others who were planning to go to college evidently did not feel that they had to make a choice immediately.

The measures of a realistic choice are the variety and quality of information it incorporates. Although direct measures of these characteristics are not available from the student interview data, there is other evidence which bears on them. Among 26 students intending to enter some post-secondary educational institution, slightly more than one-fourth had reasonably explicit plans (Table 2).

Additional evidence on the achievement of this objective is taken from Table 10. There students' career plans and educational plans are classified according to requirements for advanced training in the field. All of the students who planned to enter fields for which advanced training is required were planning to go on to seek such training, and those who were going into fields in which training is not needed were not planning to acquire any further education.

Table 10

Choice of Career and Plans for Advanced Training
by Need for Such Training

Career Type	Will Seek Advanced Training	No Plans for Advanced Training
Advanced training required	10	0
Advanced training desirable but not required	11	12
Advanced training not required	0	3
No career decision	5	3
TOTALS	26	18

NOTE: Students who named a probable career or broad area of interest are considered as having made an occupational decision. The data were taken from a different question than those in Table 3 and are not necessarily discrepant.

The large middle group includes occupations in which advanced training is not required for entry, although having it may help an individual advance faster and further. The students split about evenly between those who were and were not planning to go on for further education. Among the occupations named by those without plans for further education were agriculture, forestry, mechanic, business administrator, secretary, policeman, and social worker.

Training for a mechanic or heavy equipment operator obviously varies in length and intensity from that of a marine biologist or pharmacist. More information on the kind of schooling students would acquire would have helped in assessing the realism of their decisions. Most students preferred either to going to college or getting more "schooling" without specifying the kind of school they had in mind.

Objective 2: Students Will Increase Their Knowledge of the Variety of Occupations in the World of Work.

Occupational information was mentioned more frequently than any other response among the gains from the EBCE program (Table 8). More than one-third of the students reported they had gained occupational information.

Seven students had acquired information about careers which they had not previously considered but were now actively considering (Table 3), and nine other individuals had eliminated an earlier choice of career in favor of a new one as a result of participating in the program (Table 3).

Objective 3: Students Will Identify Functional, Adaptive, and Specific Skills Required in Work Situations.

Approximately half of the responses dealing with gains to students from the EBCE program had to do with job-related skills, social skills, and character development (Table 8).

Sixteen students actually performed the job to which they were assigned (Table 6). These students cited that as a reason for liking a job experience; others may have also have done it without mentioning it. Fourteen persons reported they learned something new or useful on job assignments (Table 6).

Objective 4: Students Will Develop Acceptable Problem Solving, Planning, and Decision-Making Skills.

Students' career plans and educational plans are compatible (Table 10), with those entering fields requiring additional training planning for it and those going to jobs without such requirements not planning on it. Some students in the middle group (where advanced training is optional) may find future advancement blocked by lack of training.

Many of the students who were planning to go to college or seek other types of advanced training did not show evidence of acceptable planning skills (Table 2).

Objective 5: Students Will Document Educational Needs in Relation to Career and/or Academic Goals.

Data from Tables 2 and 10 relate to this objective. Earlier discussions are pertinent here.

Objective 6: Students Will Develop the Communications Skills Necessary to Function Competitively in the Career Areas They Choose.

Although direct evidence of students having successfully completed this objective was not contained in the student interview data, some comments provide indirect evidence of the level of goal completion. For example, all except one student completed requirements for the high school diploma by June, and he completed the requirements during the summer of 1973.

Approximately 30 percent of participants reported they worked harder in the EBCE program compared to about 14 percent who felt the EBCE program was easier than the student's previous school. Half of the students reported they had learned more in EBCE than in their previous school; only about five percent of students had acquired more knowledge at the other school.

Appendix

Student Interview Form

1. What are your immediate plans?

   a. Loaf
   b. Work
   c. Go to school
   d. Go to service
   e. Housewife

   How long do you plan on doing "this"?

   Why are you planning on doing "this"?

2. Do you now know what career you intend to follow?

   Did the EBCE program influence your decision in any way?

   You indicated at the beginning of the _____ a desire or interest in the __(career)_____. Do you still intend to pursue _____?

   What are the reasons why you are or are not?

   Did the EBCE program have any influence?

3. What are the things you remember most of the employer sites you liked best?

   ....you liked least?

4. Do you now have more or less jobs or job opportunities of interest to you? (Explain.)

   Do you now have more or no more job opportunities that you know about? (Explain.)

5. Which site had the most positive effect on you?

   ....most negative effect on you?

   How were you treated at the employer site? (Part of the group or on your own)

6. Can you tell me what you expected from the EBCE program when you first entered the program?

   Was the program the same as what you thought it would be? (Explain.)

7. How well did the EBCE program meet your school requirements?

   ....career or job interests?

8. Do you have any interests now that you did not have previously?

   Career--

   Non-career--

9. What have you specifically gained from the EBCE program?

10. What would you have gained more of at your home school?

11. Would you select to participate in the EBCE program again?

12. If you were given the opportunity to spend another year with the EBCE program, would you?

13. What changes should be made in the EBCE program to make it a better program?

14. Did you have enough peer (explain) interaction or did you feel left out of events with students your own age?

15. What or how did you interpret education on the Semantic Differential?

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